



Ambassador Lewis A. Lukens
Remarks
Counter-Narcotics Harmonization Inter-Ministerial Conference
September 12, 2012

(As prepared)

His Excellency, the Prime Minister of the Republic of Senegal,
Ministers of the Sub Region,
Representatives of the Economic Community of West African States, the European Union, and
the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime,
National Delegations,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Thank you for inviting me to speak to you today on behalf of the United States Mission to Senegal and Guinea-Bissau. I speak for a dedicated team of men and women; Americans and Senegalese who understand and appreciate what each of you is contributing to the region's security efforts.

Today, we are gathered to celebrate the result of nearly three years of work that required vision, international cooperation, and dedication...a draft law for the Harmonization of Counter-Narcotics Trafficking Legislation.

West Africa has seen an upswing in the volume and sophistication of drug trafficking over the past decade. And we know that narcotics trafficking enables other criminal activity. Simply put, narco-trafficking is an international problem that has a detrimental impact on our collective security and our societies. We must work effectively to counter it, and we must do so collectively.

Because of these disturbing trends, six countries supported by international partners met in 2010 to address this cross-regional problem. The result of that conference was the *Dakar Initiative Support Program*, a mechanism to address drug trafficking and to design regional solutions. One

such solution was harmonized legislation and increased international cooperation across the sub-region to allow for coordinated and consolidated legal responses.

I congratulate you on your vision in recognizing that an effective approach to countering narcotics trafficking requires a common regional approach. We in the United States know how difficult this can be. Over the past several decades, we have harmonized legal efforts across our fifty States, including in the areas of drug control. The process was long, sometimes difficult, and required breaking down institutional rivalries and barriers. Your task is even more daunting, because instead of harmonizing across parts of a single country, you are working to do the same across multiple international borders involving multiple governments.

That being said, two years after that initial 2010 conference, this conference of ministers has been called to receive and review harmonization legislation: *not bad at all*. Drafted by the Senegalese Inter-Ministerial Committee on Drug Control, and containing international input and analysis, this legislation is the focus of this conference. Over the past two days, working groups from the participating nations have been diligently revising and refining the draft for its presentation today.

As the ministerial delegations prepare to receive the draft Harmonized Legislation, I would like to underline three things:

First, without a harmonized regional approach to counter-narcotics, the traffickers will continue to find and exploit the “fault lines” that occur naturally.

Second, the benefits of a regional approach -- improved international cooperation with clearly-defined roles, ease of information sharing and the ability to conduct joint operations -- can and should be expanded into other areas of international cooperation and actions.

And finally, as you move to debate and adopt this framework in your individual countries, I urge your continued support for this project. The process will be long, and may be frustrating, but the end result will be a common approach to a threat that impacts us all, no matter our individual nationalities. As you pursue this regional project of legislation harmonization, we will be there with you.

Thank you for allowing us to participate as a partner in this important and critical effort.